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worn and jaded "cits" little rambles in the country within easy reach of London, with a running account of the country, and talks with the inhabitants, illustrating their peculiarities. The introduction of conversation serves to relieve the otherwise necessarily monotonous character of the descriptive writing, and to make the places seem more full of life and more natural than they otherwise would. Without being very original, or very different from a good many other books, Mr. Jennings's volume is entertaining, and contains a great deal of information which those for whom it is intended will find really valuable.

10.—*Popular Astronomy.* By SIMON NEWCOMB, LL. D., Professor U. S. Naval Observatory. With One Hundred and Twelve Engravings and Five Maps of the Stars. New York: Harper & Brothers. 1878. 8vo, pp. xvi.–566.

PROF. NEWCOMB has undertaken to popularize the subject of astronomy in a manner which, we believe, has never been attempted before—by an historical method of study. The book being intended for persons who are not mathematicians, he has conceived the idea that the best way to make astronomical science intelligible is to follow, with the individual, the path which the world as a whole has followed, familiarizing him first with the simple facts relating to the heavenly bodies, observable by a totally ignorant person or a child, and thence deducing the astronomical system, which at first seems to explain them; then proceeding to examine the changes and modifications of this system, which a knowledge of the spherical form of the earth makes necessary; then gradually taking in more and more until we reach the modern conception of the solar system and the universe. In this order we do not, at the outset, know anything about Kepler's laws, or the attraction of gravitation. We begin the study as the shepherd kings of Chaldea may be supposed to have begun it; and, gradually bringing to our aid step by step the stores of knowledge and generalization that have been accumulated since their time, we prepare our mind exactly as the mind of the human race was prepared for each new discovery—by what has gone before. This system has the great advantage of acquainting us at one and the same time with the science and with the history of its development, and shows us, what most people have a very faint conception of—that, since the earliest times, no important discovery in it has been made even by Newton himself, without the aid of the knowledge given to the world by the discoverer's predecessors ; that Newton could not have existed but for Kepler, nor Copernicus but for Ptolemy. We may, with some hesitation, and in all deference to Dr. Newcomb's judgment, suggest that he has made a little too much of his historical method, and has credited the student with the possibility of a too dense ignorance at the outset. Every child in modern times is born with—or at any rate acquires so early in life that we may say he is born with it—a knowledge of the sphericality of the earth, and of the diurnal revolution of that planet on which he lives, and even of the attraction of gravitation. This knowledge he cannot efface, and hence it rather requires an effort for him to imagine that the apparent motions of the heavenly bodies are real, that the sun goes round the earth, or that the earth is flat. On this account we believe it is easier for him to study astronomy in the light of the existing laws than by a quasi-historical method; and on this account we should be inclined to believe that Herschel's well-known treatise, in which the other method is pursued, would in some respects be less difficult to the ordinary student than Dr. Newcomb's. But we do not desire to express a positive opinion on the point, which must, after all, be tested by experience ; and the actual historical information contained in his book is so great that we should be inclined to hope the doubt might be settled in its favor. The experiment will, of course, be made. It is impossible to read ten pages of the work without seeing that it must make its way at once into schools and colleges all over the country.

Dr. Newcomb has divided his book into four parts, only the first of which is devoted to this historical development. The second part is devoted to "practical" astronomy, or, in other words, to the description of telescopes, their history and uses, the method of measuring distances in the heavens, the motion of light, and the spectroscope. The third part treats of the solar system, and the fourth part of the stellar universe; and here—in the discussion of the fascinating problems suggested by the known facts as to the constitution and probable origin of the heavenly bodies—will be found for most readers the principal attraction of the book. Here, we are glad to say, the author has avoided the danger—to which another distinguished popularizer of astronomy has frequently fallen a victim—of writing dogmatically or controversially upon disputed points. Wherever doubts exist, he states them, but does not, in such matters, ever allow himself to become a partisan. When he can, he gives the views of eminent astronomers, allowing the student to gather from them the present condition of the study. For instance, on the subject of the physical constitution of the sun, he gives (page 265) the views of Father Secchi, of M. Faye, and of Professors Young and Langley, besides his own, pointing out that certain differences in these views on minor points "are unavoidable in the investigation of so difficult a subject." As a whole, the book, we have no hesitation in saying, is the most valuable of its kind yet produced in this country, if not in the world.